

Raising LLAMAS

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LLAMAS

South American beast of burden is finding a career as pet and pack animal in Utah

By Elaine Jarvik

Deseret News staff writer

COWS ALWAYS look kind of bored, and horses generally pretend not to notice you. Dogs make too big a production out of everything. But consider the llama.

Llamas don't smell. They don't eat much. They're quiet. They pay you just the right amount of attention: polite and interested but not pushy.

And if that's not enough to recommend them, a bred female llama sells these days for at least \$11,000.

Gus and Jeannie Hansen have been raising llamas for 12 years on their five acres in Bountiful, just past the "Llama x-ing" sign on North Canyon Rd.

Llamas — as pets, pack animals and investments — have become increasingly popular nationwide, especially in the West, say the Hansens. Utah has been slower to get excited about llamas, but that seems to be changing.

The Hansens have had hundreds of llamas over the past dozen years, so many in fact that they have resorted to naming them after their friends. Their current stock numbers 40, plus 13 new baby llamas — perky, soft little creatures that bounce gracefully around the field just minutes after being born. Their eager faces and gentle ways have been a comfort to the Hansens, whose son was killed in a bicycle accident in October.

One of the oldest domestic animals in the world, the llama is a member of the camelid family, which also includes alpacas, guanacos and vicunas, as well as the one-humped and two-

humped camel.

While camels look sort of dopey, however, llamas look dignified and aristocratic, probably because of their long neck and good posture.

Like camels, they spit. "But the whole spitting thing is a bad rap," says Gus Hansen. Llamas will generally only spit at enemies, or at each other if they're fighting over food. The mother llamas will spit at the Hansens' dogs to protect their new babies, and will also make polite little honking noises. As for spitting at people, that generally only happens at zoos, especially petting zoos, where

which keeps the prices of those raised in the U.S. relatively high. A young male sells for about \$700, while the best unbred females will generally bring at least \$8,000. Studs have been known to bring \$45,000.

Despite their aristocratic bearing and their impressive price tags, llamas are basically beasts of burden, at least in South America. Now they are growing in popularity as pack animals in the U.S., too, says Jeanne Hansen. Not only are they calm and sure-footed travelers, but their padded feet have minimal impact on the backcountry.



Jeannie Hansen thinks llamas makes ideal pets. She has raised the animals for 12 years.

Arch Arnold, who operates Piute Creek Outfitters out of Kamas, uses llamas along with horses for pack trips from May through October. Llamas, he explains, are easier to saddle up and cheaper to feed than horses. One bale of hay will last an adult llama 7 to 10 days.

Marge Armstrong of Bountiful keeps four llamas on a farm in Eden and hopes to start a pack trips business next summer. Armstrong wants to get women involved in the outdoors and thinks the gentle, polite but sturdy llamas will make the perfect pack companion. She is even talking about "business picnics" in which llamas would carry the picnic.

Although they make a rather large house pet, llamas can be house trained, notes Hansen, who says there is a lady in Washington state whose llama likes to watch TV.

Hansen is enthusiastic about llamas and eager to sell them, but she says she won't sell a llama to anybody who doesn't already have another one or who won't buy two. The animals just get too lonely and sad, she says.

the llamas are smothered and strangled by adoring children.

Most of the 10,000 llamas in the U.S. are descendants of a herd owned by William Randolph Hearst at his California estate in the 1920s. Importing llamas is restricted today,

LLAMAS

